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# METROPOLITAN PLANNING COMMISSION

*“Planning the Future - Respecting the Past”*

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**TO:** The Planning Commission

**FROM:** City of Savannah, Planning and Urban Design Department

**DATE:** February 7, 2023

**SUBJECT:** Text Amendment to the City of Savannah Zoning Ordinance  
**Re: Amendment to Section 8.7, 13.2 and 13.5. Accessory Structures and Uses; Defined Terms, General; Defined Terms, Historic.**

**Applicant: City of Savannah**

**Marcus Lotson, Director of Development Services**

**MPC FILE NO: 22-005883-ZA**

**ISSUE:**

Proposed amendments to the Savannah Zoning Ordinance related to changes to the requirements associated with Accessory Dwelling Units, defined terms and development standards.

**BACKGROUND:**

In November of 2022, City of Savannah staff made a presentation to the Mayor and Aldermen during the Council Workshop specific to information on Accessory Dwelling Units (ADU's). The purpose of the presentation was to give Council information on the benefits, history and current ordinances that govern ADU's. In addition, to discuss how revisions to the current standards could support the City's larger affordable housing efforts within the Housing Savannah Action Plan, and to share the results of a public input survey that had been conducted earlier that year.

**FINDINGS:**

1. Beginning in April 2022, City staff conducted a series of six neighborhood outreach meetings in order to get feedback from stakeholders regarding the current ADU regulations and what, if any, changes should be made. After the meetings concluded, staff deployed the aforementioned survey which had a range of questions dealing with development standards like height, parking, and architectural compatibility, to how they would relate to short term vacation rental and incentives for sustainable construction methods being used.

Proposed Changes to ADU Development Standards			
Development Standard	Current Regulation	Proposed Change	MPC Findings
<b>Lot Area</b>	In A-1; RSF; RTF; RMF and TR zoning districts 200% of the minimum lot area for the district is required for an ADU. Standard is not variable.	Reduce requirement from 200% to 150%.  Allow variances.  Require HPC or HDBR recommendation when in those overlays.	Cap maximum variance to 125% of requirement.  Where a principal dwelling is multifamily, ADU's should be prohibited but one dwelling unit above the maximum density should be permitted.
<b>Building Size</b>	ADU shall not exceed 40% of <u>habitable floor area</u> of principal building.  In A-1; RSF-E; RSF-20 and RSF-30, same requirement of 1,000 sq. feet whichever is less.  Unit shall be minimum 400 sf habitable.  Max of 1 bedroom	Use <u>principal building footprint</u> not habitable floor area for calculation to address multistory residences.  Unit shall meet building code requirement.	In A-1; RSF-E; RSF-20- and RSF-30 ADU max 1,000 sq. feet and up to 2 bedrooms.  All other districts where permitted, ADU's should not exceed 700 sq. feet and 1 bedroom.
<b>Height</b>		All permitted districts, ADU's shall not exceed 25 feet or the height of principal building, whichever is less.  Any portion of an ADU over 15 feet in height shall be located at least 15 feet from a rear property line that does not abut a lane.  Variance requests require recommendation by HPC for parcels located in a conservation overlay, or National Register Historic District without a Local Historic Overlay.	
<b>Parking</b>		ADU's within one – quarter mile of a transit facility shall not require off street parking.	When a principal dwelling has no off-street parking ADU parking should be required.

2. The survey captured 690 respondents and the survey data along with other research done by City staff resulted in a series of proposed amendments to the current ADU regulations. The proposed revisions are in two categories, development standards and definitions. Proposed changes and MPC staff comments / alternatives are as follows:
3. These proposed amendments are designed to make incremental changes to the rules which govern ADU's, to make them feasible housing options in more areas of the city, and to protect adjacent properties from the impacts of over-building.
4. In addition to proposed changes in development standards, there are also proposed changes to definitions. Proposed redactions are in ~~strike through~~, proposed additions are in **red and underlined**.

<b>Definitions</b>
<b>Accessory Dwelling Unit:</b> A structure used as an individual residential unit located on the same lot as the principal dwelling, <u>which contains permanent provisions for a living space with a bedroom, kitchen, and bathroom.</u>
<b>Accessory Structure:</b> Any structure, including a building, that is subordinate to the permitted principal use or principal building on the same lot, and that serves a purpose clearly incidental to the lot, structure or building. <u>The term accessory structure does not include Accessory Dwelling Unit or Caretaker's Residential Unit.</u> Although subordinate, some accessory structures may not be permitted in certain zoning districts.
<b>Caretaker's Residential Dwelling Unit:</b> A structure constructed to residential occupancy standards in compliance with applicable building codes that is accessory to a nonresidential use. The structure serves as the residence of a caretaker, who is responsible for property management and/or security and may accommodate the caretaker's household.
<b><u>National Register Historic Districts without a Local Historic Overlay:</u></b> <u>The National Register was established by the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 and is maintained by the U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service. National Register Historic Districts that do not have a local historic overlay district include Pine Gardens, Gordonston, Bonaventure, Eastside/Meadows/Collinsville, Central of Georgia, Laurel Grove North, Laurel Grove South, Kensington Park-Groveland, and Fairway Oaks-Greenview.</u>
<b>Building Footprint:</b> <del>The area within the exterior walls of a building that is under roof.</del> <u>The building footprint shall be measured as the area at finished grade that is within the exterior faces of the exterior walls. Where buildings are attached, the measurement shall be from the centerline of the wall separating the attached buildings. In the absence of surrounding exterior walls, the building footprint shall be the ground floor area of a building that is under a roof.</u>

**POLICY ANALYSIS:**

During the process of adopting the current zoning ordinance (NewZO), accessory dwellings were one of the topics discussed at great length with City Council members and residents. Because it was a new use being added to the Ordinance, there was some desire to limit the allowance to areas that historically had development patterns that included accessory dwellings. Since that time, the interest in accessory dwellings has increased and the use has become accepted as a viable housing option for those outside of the traditional neighborhoods.

Many of the standards that were put in place with NewZO were chosen with concern that single family neighborhoods, that did not historically include accessory dwellings, might be negatively impacted by allowing them. NewZo also created Caretakers Residential Units which are accessory to a nonresidential use. Due to its similarity with ADU’s, it could be removed from the ordinance. The proposed changes would still limit ADU’s in more suburban residential areas; but take another step toward broader allowance with conditions related to lot dimensions, building size and height. In review of the proposed changes, MPC staff finds that there are opportunities to further improve the ordinance by managing the scale of ADU’s in infill scenarios, limiting the amount of variance that can be requested, and by addressing parking when requirements have not been otherwise satisfied for a residence.

As the City continues to address housing needs, accessory dwellings will likely be a part of increasing availability and diversity of housing options and providing a more affordable alternative in the marketplace. If ADU’s are going to be more widely permitted, the regulations must assure that existing residents are not impacted by issues related to building placement, scale or the provision of off-street parking.

**RECOMMENDATION:**

MPC Staff recommends **approval** of the proposed amendments to Sec. 8.7, 13.2 and 13. 5 of the Savannah Zoning Ordinance **with the following recommended revisions:**

Accessory Dwelling Units	
Current Proposal	MPC Recommendation
Sec. 8.7.4 allows ADU’s in multifamily zoning districts.	Remove allowance from multifamily zoning districts; permit one additional unit over allowed density.
Sec. 8.7.4b allows variance to minimum lot area requirement for ADU’s.  Also states that when variances are requested in a Conservation Overlay or National Register District without an overlay, the HPC shall provide a recommendation to the ZBA.	Cap maximum variance amount to 125% of requirement.  Require HPC recommendation for all variances requested in Conservation Overlay or National Register District without an overlay.

Sec. 8.7.4d states that an ADU shall be no larger than 40% of the principal building footprint.	Cap ADU's to 700 sq. feet where permitted excluding A-1; RSF-E; RSF-20 and RSF-30
Sec. 8.7.4 d (iii) states that one bedroom is permitted per ADU. In A-1; RSF-E; RSF-20 and RSF-30 districts ADU's shall not exceed 40% of the principal building footprint or 1,000 sq. feet whichever is less.	Because these are large lot subdivisions with ADU's up to 1,000 sq. feet, an increased maximum from 1 (currently allowed) to 2 bedrooms is appropriate.
Sec. 8.7.4f states that ADU's within one quarter mile of a transit stop shall not be required to provide off street parking.	Where principal residence parking has not been satisfied, ADU's shall be required to provide one off street parking space.
Sec. 13.2 includes Caretakers Dwelling Unit as an allowed use	Remove Caretakers Dwelling Unit.

*Note: This recommendation could change subject to new information provided at the meeting. Final decisions will be made by the Commission at the public hearing based on information provided at the meeting.*